

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4563

INFO AMCONSUL KARACHI

AMCONSUL LAHORE

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 4283

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJ: DISARRAY IN PUNJAB: BHUTTO'S POSITION

SUMMARY: WE SPECULATE THAT BHUTTO HAS PERMITTED PEOPLES' PARTY (PPP) BICKERING IN PUNJAB TO CONTINUE FOR COMBINATION OF REASONS, LARGELY POLITICAL BUT ALSO INCLUDING HIS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH OUSTED CHIEF MINISTER KHAR. HOWEVER, BHUTTO CANNOT PERMIT KHARHAO SUCCEED IN TOPPLING PRESENT PUNJAB MINISTRY WITHOUT SUBSTANTIAL POLITICAL COST TO BHUTTO - A PRICE BHUTTO WILL PROBABLY NOT BE WILLING TO PAY. PUNJAB AFFAIR HAS PROBABLY DAMAGED HIS PARTY'S IMAGE BY DEMONSTRATING THAT PPP POLITICIANS ARE, AFTER ALL, LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM USUAL RUN OF THE MILL POLITICIANS SEARCHING FOR PERSONAL GAIN AND POWER. END SUMMARY.

1. CONSULATE LAHORE HAS REPORTED EXTENSIVELY ON BICKERING BETWEEN OUSTED PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER KHAR AND HIS SUCCESSOR. SOME ASPECTS OF THIS CONTRETEMPS REMAIN A PUZZLE TO OBSERVERS. WHY HAS BHUTTO PERMITTED IT TO CONTINUE FOR ALMOST TWO MONTHS? WHAT DOES KHAR HOPE TO ACHIEVE BY HIS CURRENT SPOILER ROLE? WE WOULD
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LIKE TO OFFER SOME TENTATIVE OBSERVATIONS ON PPP

IMBROGLIO IN PUNJAB FROM THIS DPWTANCE.

2. ALTHOUGH BHUTTO PRESUMABLY HAS INTERVENED PERSONALLY AND THROUGH INTERMEDIARIES TO END THE SQUABBLING, HE HAS REFUSED TO BE DRAWN INTO THE AFFAIR PUBLICLY BEYOND ENDORSING THE RAMAY MINISTRY, DEPLORING MUD-SLINGING, AND REITERATING HIS PERSONAL FRIENDSHIP WITH KHAR (LAHORE 594). MOREOVER, BHUTTOSS ABOVE-THE-FRAY PUBLIC STANCE APPEARS TO EXTEND TO PRACTICAL LEVEL AS WELL, SINCE KHAR HAS NOT YET BEEN SUBJECTED TO HARASSMENT GENERALLY METED OUT TO THOSE WHO CROSS PRIME MINISTER. WHAT THIS SUGGESTS TO US IS THAT BHUTTO, POSSIBLY OUT OF LOYALTY TO ONE OF HIS EARLIEST AND MOST DEVOTED FOLLOWERS AND OUT OF PERSONAL SENTIMENT, MAY BE UNWILLING TO PERMIT THE CENTRAL OR PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS TO TURN THEIR FULL COERCIVE POWERS AGAINST KHAR AT THIS TIME. (THERE HAVE BEEN EXCEPTIONS SUCH AS DISRUPTION OF KHAR'S ONE SPEECHMAKING EFFORT, RECENT BRIEF ARRESTS OF SOME KHAR SUPPORTERS, AND REVIVAL OF CORRUPTION CHARGES AGAINST KHAR AND HIS FAMILY.) ON POLITICAL LEVEL, BHUTTO HAS EVIDENCED DESIRE TO AVOID COMPLETE RUPTURE WITH KHAR, A DESIRE OSTENSIBLY RECIPROCATED THUS FAR BY KHAR HIMSELF IF NOT SHARED BY ALL OF KHAR'S FOLLOWERS. THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH APPARENT BHUTTO PHILOSOPHY THAT IT IS BETTER TO KEEP SQUABBLES WITHIN PARTY FRAMEWORK THAN TO PERMIT SPLINTERING OF PARTY. FACILITATING SUCH APPROACH IS RETENTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES ACT WHICH PUNISHES WOULD-BE PARTY SWITCHERS WITH LOSS OF ELECTIVE OFFICES.

3. BHUTTO ALSO PROBABLY RECOGNIZES WHAT KHAR EVIDENTLY HAS YET TO REALIZE: ALL ODDS ARE AGAINST KHAR IN ANY CONFRONTATION WITH ADMINISTRATION. ALTHOUGH BHUTTO HAS EVIDENCED NO EMBARRASSMENT IN PAST WHEN REVERSING DECISIONS HE HAS MADE, HE CANNOT NOW DISMISS RAMAY MINISTRY WITHOUT INCURRING CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL LOSS. SUCH AN ACT WOULD BE INTERPRETED WIDELY WITHIN PPP AND BY HIS POLITICAL OPPOSITION AS STEMMING FROM WEAKNESS, AND FACTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

IN THE PARTY WOULD BE TEMPTED TO FOLLOW KHAR'S
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EXAMPLE OR AT LEAST RAISE THEIR ANTE FOR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF BHUTTO REGIME. FOR SAME REASONS, BHUTTO CANNOT PERMIT KHAR TO ENGINEER AND WIN NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE AGAINST RAMAY IN PUNJAB PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY. TO PREVENT SUCH AN EVENTUALITY, BHUTTO WOULD DOUBTLESS DISCARD HIS PERSONAL SENTIMENT AND CRACK DOWN HARD ON KHAR SUPPORTERS. OVERTHROW OF RAMAY MINISTRY IS PERIMETER WHICH BHUTTO CANNOT ALLOW KHAR TO BREAK. IN OUR VIEW, MAXIMUM KHAR

COULD HOPE TO ACHIEVE BY CONTINUING HIS STRUGGLE IS PLACEMENT OF SOME OF HIS SUPPORTERS IN RAMAY MINISTRY AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT EITHER AS MINISTERS OR AS PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES, WITH KHAR PERSONALLY RESTORED TO GOOD GRACES BY RECEIVING SOME OFFICE OR SPECIAL ADVISOR ROLE. AT WORSE, KHAR COULD BE DRUMMED OUT OF PPP LIKE ONE-TIME PARTY KINGPEN AND LAW MINISTER KASURI. AND LIKE KASURI, WE WOULD EXPECT KHAR'S ERSTWHILE FRIENDS AND POLITICAL SUPPORTERS TO VANISH QUICKLY IN SUCH CASE.

4. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT BHUTTO IS PLAYING VERY DEVIOUS GAME. BY PERMITTING IN-FIGHTING BETWEEN KHAR AND RAMAY, WHO IS SUPPORTED BY CERTAIN CENTRAL MINISTERS AND LEFT IDEOLOGUES, BHUTTO MAY HOPED THAT BOTH FACTIONS WILL BE WEAKENED. HIS OWN LEADERSHIP POSITION AS PARTY CHAIRMAN AND ARBITER OF PARTY DISPUTES WOULD THEREBY BE REAFFIRMED AND ENHANCED AS THE TWO TROUBLESOME FACTIONS CUT EACH OTHER DOWN TO SIZE. ANOTHER CONSPIRACY COULD BE THAT BHUTTO LACKS HIS CUSTOMARY CONFIDENCE IN DEALING WITH PUNJABI POLITICS. HE HAS YET TO UNDERTAKE EXTENSIVE TOUR OF PROVINCE WHICH BROUGHT HIM TO POWER IN 1970 ELECTIONS, IN SHARP CONTRAST TO HIS EXTENSIVE TOURS THROUGH OTHER PROVINCES AND EVEN AZAD KASHMIR, YHITRAL

AND GILGIT. WHILE HE UNDOUBTEDLY KNOWS ALL THE PRINCIPAL PLAYERS AND THE PUNJABI ELECTORATE, HE IS DEALING IN PUNJAB WITH MULTITUDE OF FACTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS FAR IN EXCESS OF GROUPS HE HAS MANIPULATED WITH SUCH SUCCESS IN HIS NATIVE SIND. BHUTTO MAY HAVE DECIDED THAT, AT LEAST FOR THE PRESENT, HANDS-OFF ATTITUDE WAS PRUDENT FOR HIM IN THIS SITUATION.

5. WE HAVE TENTATIVELY CONCLUDED THAT SQUABBLE IN PUNJAB
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PPP HAS TARNISHED PARTY IMAGE SOMEWHAT BY DEMONSTRATING THAT SOME PARTY PROFESSIONALS ARE SIMPLY SEEKERS AFTER POWER NOTWITHSTANDING PARTY'S RHETORIC ABOUT CHAMPIONING SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR THE MASSES. TO THE EXTENT THIS DISPLAY HAS LED PAKISTANIS TO COMPARE BHUTTO GOVERNMENT WITH THOSE EARLIER CORRUPT AND INEFFECTIVE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENTS SWEEPED AWAY BY AYUB IN 1958, BHUTTO HAS MADE A POLITICAL BLUNDER IN GIVING KHAR THE LICENSE HE HAS HAD. HOWEVER, SHOULD BLOOD-LETTING CONCLUDE WITH WEAKENED PPP LEFT WING IN PUNJAB AND WITH HUMBLING OF KHAR, BHUTTO MAY WELL EMERGE IN SHORT TERM WITH FIRMER HAND ON PUNJAB AND REST OF COUNTRY. ONE CASUALTY OF PUNJAB IN-FIGHTING PROBABLY WILL BE REORGANIZATION OF PPP, ALREADY MUCH POSTPONED AND LIKELY TO BE DEFERRED YET AGAIN.
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